



## SAMPLE OPINION PIECE FOR THE NEWSPAPER

**W**ith so much in the news these days about health care coverage, access, and the needs of the elderly, it is important to remember that families—not social service agencies, nursing homes, or government programs—are the mainstay for older persons in this country. Today more than 22.4 million persons are informal caregivers who provide unpaid help to older persons. These caregiver spouses, adult children, relatives, and friends help with shopping, transportation, and household chores as well as bathing, dressing, meals, and medications.

Already family caregivers provide more than 80 percent of all homecare services. Collectively it is believed that these individuals contribute some \$257 billion annually to the nation's health care system—an amount that significantly reduces costs to Medicare, Medicaid, and private payers. Yet although they are making a huge contribution, these caregivers—mostly women—often experience substantial stresses and burdens as a consequence.

Studies have shown that prolonged caregiving can adversely affect one's physical and psychological health, current and future earnings capability, the ability to balance the needs of older parents with younger families, and the ability to meet personal needs. Yet, as the population ages and as medical science continues to extend life, the number of family caregivers

will increase rapidly. So will their needs—especially for home and community-based services that provide personal assistance, respite, home modifications, assistive devices, and caregiver training. The question is, who cares for the caregivers?

Nearly three years ago the federal government answered that question with the implementation of the National Family Caregiver Support Program, administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Caregiver programs are now available in every state through formula grants to area agencies on aging and local community services. These programs offer caregivers information about available services and assistance with gaining access to them; individual counseling, support groups, and caregiver training; respite care; and supplemental services such as transportation, emergency response systems, home modifications, and assistive technologies. AoA has also awarded caregiver grants to tribal and native organizations representing American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.


**TODAY  
MORE THAN  
22.4 MILLION  
PERSONS ARE  
INFORMAL  
CAREGIVERS  
WHO PROVIDE  
UNPAID HELP  
TO OLDER  
PERSONS.**



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Administration on Aging  
Washington, DC 20201  
[www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

---



The good news is that the program is working. Fiscal Year 2002 data revealed that states provided access to assistance services to approximately 436,000 caregivers; counseling and training services to almost 180,000 caregivers; respite to more than 70,000 caregivers; and supplemental services to more than 50,000 caregivers. Yet a recent national survey of older Americans showed that while most caregivers want help, they are unaware of free community services. Thus the need for information is great.

The [NAME OF YOUR AGENCY] is one local organization trying to reach caregivers in our community. We urge anyone who is struggling with caregiving now, or who may be in the future, to call us at [NUMBER] or the national toll-free Eldercare Locator number, 1-800-677-1116. Because if aging isn't your issue now, it will be.